

Ministers to focus on secondary education at African conference

African education ministers will discuss challenges to secondary education on the continent at a five-day conference in Ghana.

The conference, to be held in Accra from 2 - 6 April 2007, will be attended by 38 ministers of education from the continent.

It will, among other things, ensure that secondary education is given the support it needs.

Ghana's Deputy Minister for Education, Science and Sports, Kwame Ampofo Twumasi, told Ghana News Agency in an interview that most governments had realized that the support for education had tilted towards the basic level.

"If you look at education, the watershed point is the secondary level. Therefore, our development partners led by the World Bank, have realized that this is the time to look at the secondary level," he stated.

He said so far about 293 people, including the 38 education ministers from the continent, had confirmed their participation and "they include all those who have a stake in education".

The minister said during the conference there would be "cross-fertilization" of ideas among the education ministers and their development partners.

South Africa has prioritised education by dedicating the largest share of its national budget towards the sector.

The Department of Education will receive R105.5 billion over the next three years.

Tabling the national budget for 2007/2008 in Parliament in February, Finance Minister Trevor Manuel said the government would set aside R8.1 billion for improvement of educators' salaries, teaching assistants and support staff in schools across the country.

"Our teachers are always on the frontline of our education system. It is in their hands that we place our 11 million children every day. We must pay tribute to them and ask no more than that they continue to serve with dedication and integrity," he said.

Mr Manuel said Education Minister Naledi Pandor would lead the process of determining how the resources would be used, focusing on the need to reward good teachers, provide support to poor schools and improve the general quality of

schooling.

The government, he said, had also set aside about R700 million for bursaries to encourage young people to train as teachers and pursue careers in the public schooling system.

The bursary scheme is expected to benefit about 13 000 teachers over the next three years.

"Together with resources set aside in the provincial equitable share for classroom building and providing water, electricity and sanitation in schools, the investments announced in this budget constitute a concerted effort to improve the quality of schooling," he said.

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